

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy and Subcommittee on
Energy and Power
Hearing on “NRC Policy and Governance Oversight”
July 24, 2012**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I am pleased that we were able to hold this hearing with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and I welcome Chairwoman Macfarlane to the Commission. You have a big challenge ahead of you at the Commission and we all have high hopes that you'll be able to restore the work environment at the NRC.

I would like to focus my comments today on the Fukushima nuclear accident and make some observations on NRC's many actions.

We all watched closely as the Fukushima situation played out and we're all committed to making sure that an accident like the one in Japan doesn't happen in the United States, which is why in America we already had safeguards in place to prevent such a disaster. However, if there are improvements that need to be to our system, I think we should address them to the extent practicable and necessary.

What I mean by addressing any issues to the extent necessary is recently the Japanese Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission reported that if Fukushima Daiichi had been required to implement the “B.5.b” order issued by the NRC following the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the U.S., “the accident may have been preventable.”

That same report also observed that Japanese plants were not required to consider a possible station blackout scenario, something the NRC instituted in the 1980's.

Last year, the NRC's Task Force concluded that “...events like the Fukushima accident are unlikely to occur in the United States...” and that “...continued operation and licensing activities do not pose an imminent risk to public health and safety.”

Reflecting on the NRC's lessons learned following the Three Mile Island accident, the Task Force cautioned “...some of the actions taken by the NRC after Three Mile Island were not subjected to a structured review and were subsequently not found to be of substantial safety benefit and were removed.”

On March 9 of this year, the NRC issued a series of orders without a rigorous cost-benefit analysis. I understand it was the Commission's collective judgment to proceed in that fashion due to the urgency of those high priority issues and I don't disagree.

However, it is my expectation that any regulatory actions going forward will return to the agency's practice of having a solid technical basis and rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

I urge the Commission to remember that the costs of these changes are ultimately born by consumers. For those struggling to fill their gas tanks and pay their bills, we need to ensure that any additional costs are justified by real safety benefits.